

WHACKER BILL'S CONVERSION

By H. Wadsworth Parker

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The Rev. John Rollins did not notice that his wife was holding out his bear-skin coat with both hands. He continued to stare into the depths of the open fireplace.

The nickel alarm clock ticked noisily on the high mantelshelf, the only sound in the cabin tucked under Bilger's hill. The minute hand touched 12, and Mrs. Rollins coughed apologetically.

The Reverend John came out of his trance and slipped into the waiting coat. His wife cast an adoring look up at his square shouldered six feet one.

"I hated to interrupt your thoughts, Jack, but the stage is due in a minute. Were you thinking of your sermon?"

"Not much, my girl," replied Rollins. "I was thinking of that twenty-four mile ride with Whacker Bill. It is honestly the worst feature of this charge. I like to go over to Las Vegas. They're a friendly set, and they're always glad to see me. But the ride—that foul mouthed Bill, with his swearing at every rut in the road! But I'll cure him, yet. I feel somehow as if I'd been sent to this place to save Whacker Bill's soul, and I'm going to do it."

John Rollins set his mouth in the firm curve that his wife could remember from the old football days, long before he had taken orders in the church.

The little woman clasped and unclasped her hands nervously.

"I hope, Jack, dear, you'll be very, very careful in dealing with Bill. He's an awful character, they say—and—"

"Yes, he claims to be the champion bad man of the Las Vegas valley, but you remember a certain little sling once did use business with another braggart, and I'm landing up with stones for the same trick."

He smiled cheerily into his wife's anxious face, kissed her tenderly and crossed to the door.

"Don't worry, little woman. I won't hurt him or lay myself liable to the law."

The Reverend Rollins threw open the door and gazed down the winding mountain street. The commotion in front of the postoffice told him that the stage had arrived. He stalked down the flower edged path to meet it.

When the stage plunged and swayed past the cabin, Mrs. Rollins waved her hand to her husband, sitting straight and smiling beside the rough driver. Then she ran into the house, where, burying her face in her husband's big chair, she had a hearty cry.

On and on swung the stage, Bill chatting amiably of his former triumphs when the vigilantes represented the law and life was worth living. Nothing happened to disturb his serenity until they had passed Las Cruces, when they suddenly came upon a patch of road that made the stage jerk and plow from side to side, like a ship in the teeth of a gale.

What Whacker Bill said about the road commissioners of the county would not bear publication. As he stormed and raved in the maddest of profanity the Rev. John Rollins squared round and looked Whacker Bill fairly in the eye.

"Here, you triangulated sine qua non of a perambulator, shut up!"

Bill stopped in the middle of a mighty oath and stared at the missionary in amazement. So preachers lost their temper, and such a quiet chap as Preacher Rollins too!

Bill forgot the condition of the road while he ruminated over this fact. Then they struck an ugly stone, a mailbag flew through space, and Bill came back to earth by a most profane route. Rollins held the reins while Bill went back to gather up Uncle Sam's possessions. The offending bag went up with a crash and an oath, and Bill was following with a still mightier accompaniment of profanity when he felt the young missionary's grip of steel on his wrist.

"You bifurcated prismoidal of a ne plus ultra iconoclast, stop that noise and tend to business!"

Whacker Bill climbed into the seat without a word. Rollins calmly lighted a cigar and studied the scenery, and they rode five miles in eloquent silence. Then Bill could stand it no longer.

"Fardner, whar did you farn it!"

"At college," came the terse reply.

"Lordy, an I've heard 'em called religious cemeteries!" murmured Bill, and silence once more settled between them.

Rollins was smoking his third cigar and feeling a bit nervous as they covered the last two miles into Las Vegas. Just as they caught sight of the town's lights twinkling in the mist one of the lead horses stumbled and fell. In ten seconds there was a mad combination of horses, tangled harness and profanity in front of the stage. When the damage had been repaired to a steady fire of cuss words, Bill returned to his post, swearing as he mounted the step, swearing as he gathered up his lines, swearing as he cracked the whip. Then that calm, even voice fell upon his ear.

"That's enough from you, you quad-rangular hypotenuse and polyhedral old scout—you triangular, trigonometrical descendant of the antediluvian period!"

Bill fairly gasped. Words failed him. One hand clasped the lines, and the fingers of the other worked nervously, but it was not raised against his com-

panion. The latter continued to gaze at him sternly.

"You psychological progeny of a mythological ancestry, you zanthidium cosmopolite, you problematical descendant of decadent progenitors, I want you to understand that when I'm riding with you and there's any swearing to be done I will do it! You don't know good cuss words when you see them."

The stage drew up before the Empire hotel. Five minutes later Whacker Bill stumbled up to the bar and asked huskily for his usual drink.

"Make it two, Jimmy, make it two, and make 'em stiff."

And he drank them slowly, staring moodily across the rim of his glass at the circle of men who wondered if Bill had a "tech" of malaria.

That night after Rollins had conducted evening service in the chapel and had baptized two babies he returned to the Empire hotel to find Whacker Bill waiting for him. They went to his room in silence, and the bad man of Las Vegas valley laid a motley array of trophies on the missionary's table.

"That's a couple uv leads as was found in men I put to sleep; that's a lock uv Jim Dewey's hair, him that I knocked out in four roun's in eighty-one; that's a couple uv claws from a grizzly I laid out in a clean fight an' a gun I yanked from as good an Injun as ever et dust. They're yours."

Rollins looked at the bad man in well assumed amazement.

"Why are you bringing them to me?"

"You've 'arned 'em, pardner. I thought I could swear, but I ain't one-two-three with you. We can't walk on the same side uv the street when it comes to cussin'. Take 'em. It's a cinch that if we put up a cussin' match you'd win, an' I'm ready to cry quits ef you are."

They shook hands on the deal, and Whacker Bill went down for another drink. The Rev. John Rollins had a letter to write. It was addressed to a struggling young lawyer in an eastern city, and it wound up as follows:

"So I send you the trophies of my first victory, likewise the first use I have ever had of my geometrical studies. Hang the souvenirs in your den along with the check you receive for your first case. You ought to have a fairish collection if all the old crowd contribute, scattered, as we are, from Dan to Beersheba. Come out next summer, and I'll introduce you to the bad man who went down before theological profanity. He's a character."

And in the cabin under Bilger's hill a sweet faced little woman was praying the good Lord not to let Whacker Bill hurt her dear Jack.

Must Have Been Asleep.

Mr. W. P. Firth, the artist, once related this anecdote of a picture collector of his acquaintance, an irascible country squire. The old gentleman frequently dined with his country neighbors and drove home, often several miles, late at night. Once, after dining heavily, he fell asleep and did not wake when the carriage drew up before his home. The coachman made the usual halt—it was the old man's custom to let himself out—and then, supposing the passenger had alighted, drove to the stable.

Some time later, while enjoying a late supper, the butler inquired his master's whereabouts. Was he spending the night out? A brief dismayed colloquy ensued, but they divined the situation and rose to it. Tip-toeing stealthily out to the coachhouse, they peeped into the carriage, beheld its slumbering occupant, cautiously fed out and re-harnessed the horses and drove him, still snoring, back to his own front door, where the butler ventured to awake him and obsequiously ushered him in.

"Bless my soul, I must have been asleep!" he muttered drowsily as he stumbled up the steps, but he never guessed that he had spent a part of the night in his own coachhouse, and the two clever servants kept their own counsel—and their places.—Manchester Times.

A Badly Timed Bath.

In his biography of Cecil Rhodes, Howard Hensman tells the following story: "Rhodes, it seems, then premier of Cape Colony, was to open an extension of the Cape Town Suburban railway, and many conspicuous personages were present on the occasion. After a luncheon at Cape Town the brilliant company adjourned to the shore, where the railway station was located.

"Everything was in readiness for the opening ceremony, when suddenly it was noticed that the central figure, Rhodes, was missing. There was some little consternation at this, and messengers were sent in all directions to find him. Presently the prime minister was espied calmly enjoying a bath in the blue waters, totally oblivious of the fact that he was keeping every one waiting. At length the situation seemed to dawn upon him, and, hastily getting into his clothes, with the sea water dripping from his hair, he declared the line open for traffic, maintaining the while a perfectly serious and composed face."

His Memory Was Weak.

An elderly widower was so dull and stupid that it was very difficult to marry him. When told to give his right hand, he gave his left. When the minister said, "Say this after me," he immediately remarked, "Say this after me," but when the words he was to repeat were given he was stolidly silent.

"At last," says the narrator, "he saw that I was somewhat bothered by his extreme stupidity, so in the middle of the service he upset my gravity by volunteering the following apology. 'You see, sir, it's so long since I was married afore that you must excuse my forgetting of these things.'"—Cornhill Magazine.

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ANIMALS NEVER IDLE.

They Manage to Keep Very Busy Without Doing Very Much.

How is it that birds and beasts manage to pass through life without succumbing to ennui, or, at least, without being bored nearly to death? Animals, as a rule, do not loaf. It is not thus that they solve the problem. Loafing is an art which but few living creatures understand. Lizards, crocodiles and chapsarras are the greatest authorities on the subject. Animals have acquired the knack of making much ado about nothing; they have learned to be very busy without doing anything. This accomplishment obviously differs from that of loafing. It is one which animals have brought to perfection and of which many human beings, chiefly women, are very able exponents. There is overheard a wasp busily exploring the holes in the trunk of a tree. Why he does this he probably does not know; he has no time to stop and think. He is quite content to explore away as though his life depended upon it. Five times within the last six minutes he has minutely inspected every portion of the same hole. All his labor is useless, in a sense; without it, however, the wasp would in all probability die of ennui. Most animals are experts at frittering away time; they spend much of their lives in actively doing nothing. Watch a canary in a cage. He hops backward and forward between two perches as though he was paid by the distance for doing so. Look at a butterfly. It leads an aimless existence. Nevertheless it is always busy. A bee probably visits twenty times as many flowers in the day as a butterfly; for all that the butterfly is always on the move.

When speaking of the swift, I notice how long it took to find the materials for its nest, how it went afar off to seek that which was at its feet. This, although the result of stupidity, is doubtless a blessing to the bird. Nest building affords great pleasure to the bird—the more protracted the amusement the better for the architect. The squirrel labors from early morn till late eve laying up a store of nuts. When one storehouse is full, the industrious animal opens another and then proceeds to forget the existence of the first. Lastly, animals spend no inconsiderable portion of the day in play. Nearly all the higher animals indulge in play; some go so far as to play regular games.—Times of India.

WISDOM OF NOVELISTS.

It is mostly the women who are the gamblers, the men only the cards.—Thomas Hardy.

Cynicism is merely the art of seeing things as they are instead of as they ought to be.—Robert Hichens.

There is no man so much at the mercy of his own vanity as he who enjoys a limited notoriety.—Seton Merriman.

A wise man reduces his affairs to a minimum and his interests in the affairs of his neighbors to less.—Seton Merriman.

It is his sweetheart a man should be particular about. Once he settles down, it does not much matter whom he marries.—J. M. Barrie.

Good finance is knowing how to utilize the fullness of other people's pockets without revealing the emptiness of one's own.—Richard Bagot.

A person who can't argue is like a person who can't chew. He swallows the facts of life unprepared for digestion.—Sara Jeanette Duncan.

The Vote Was a Failure.

The worthy Sunday school superintendent was illustrating the text, "Whosoever a man soweth that shall he also reap."

Superintendent—If I want to raise a crop of turnips what sort of seed must I sow?

Children—Turnip seed.

Superintendent—If I want to raise a crop of tomatoes what kind of seed must I sow?

Children—Tomato seed.

Superintendent—Very good. Now, if you want to raise a crop of good manhood what kind of seed must you sow?

And an observer who kept tally reported that the school on test vote was a tie between turnip seed and tomato seed.

A Vicious Fish.

In South America there is a small fish that not only attacks its fellows of the sea and river, but is greatly dreaded by the natives, who during certain seasons have to ford the streams in which the caribitos are found. Bathers are often attacked by them, the sharp, chisel shaped teeth taking a bit from the flesh wherever they attack. They are perfect scavengers, eating the animals that float down the river—dead or alive.

Jealous Man.

Mrs. Pretty—Isn't it strange? Mrs. Beauti has not put on mourning for her husband.

Mr. Pretty—I understand that her late husband particularly requested that she should not.

Mrs. Pretty—The brute! I suppose he knew how lovely she would look in it.—Pick-Me-Up.

A DIME-A-BOX.

"Horace says, 'Mingle a little folly with your wisdom.'"

"Yes, that's easy enough. But it's another matter when it comes to mingling a little wisdom with your folly."—Chicago Record-Herald.

Not Always So.

Tess—So you're broken with him? Jess—Yes. He was entirely too hard to please.

Tess—Gracious! How he must have changed since he proposed to you!—Philadelphia Press.

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